

GA 2013 Reflection Group Guide

Introduction: The purpose of these gatherings is to provide space for deeper reflection on your experience at General Assembly. This guide is meant to structure the conversation, but is not meant to be constrictive. Feel free to modify to fit the needs and responses of the group. The convener may distribute readings among the participants as the group chooses.

If someone in the group has a smartphone it would be helpful to download the “Illuminations” app and use that to light a virtual chalice and to find reflective readings.

Session 1: Thursday, June 20, 2013 (12:45—1:30 PM)

Theme: *Promises to One Another*

Check-in (3 minutes): A brief check-in about what brought each of you to this General Assembly.

Virtual Chalice Lighting / Opening (3 minutes)

Opening Song: *Gathered Here #389 - Philip Porter (to be sung or chanted)*

Gathered here in the mystery of the hour

Gathered here in one strong body

Gathered here in the struggle and the power

Spirit draw near.

Creation of a Group Covenant (5 minutes): See “Special Convener Instructions”

Opening Reading (2 minutes):

God Has No Borders by Rod Richards

from *Falling Into the Sky: A Meditation Anthology* (Skinner House, 2013)

We humans are the line-drawers. We are the border-makers.

We are the boundary-testers. We are the census-takers.

We draw a line to separate this from that, so we can see clearly what each is.

We create a border to define our place, so we can take care of what's there.

We test boundaries to find if they are real, if they are necessary, if they are just.

We congregate within those boundaries in families and tribes and cities and countries that we call us. And we call people on the other side them.

But our minds seek boundaries that our hearts know not.

The lines we draw disappear when viewed with eyes of compassion.

The recognition of human kinship does not end at any border.

A wise part of us knows that the other is us, and we them.

Let justice flow like water and peace like a never-ending stream.

Let compassion glow like sunlight and love like an ever-shining beam.

The rain, the sunshine, the breeze, the life-giving air we breathe --
they know no boundaries. Neither do our empathy, our good will,
our concern for one another.

God has no borders. Love has no borders. Let us lift up the awareness of our unity
as we celebrate our awesome diversity on this beautiful day.

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Activity 1 (5 minutes): Invite two people to read the following out loud, the first time through at a normal rate, the second time more slowly.

The term “Beloved Community” was popularized by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who learned it from students of the philosopher Josiah Royce. Columbia University’s Gary Dorrien, author of a three-part history of American liberal theology, writes that for Royce and his disciples, Beloved Community expressed the ethical meaning of the kingdom of God. King taught that the foundation of the Beloved Community is the divine indwelling that equally graces all people: “There is no graded scale of essential worth [wrote King]; there is no divine right of one race which differs from the divine right of another. Every human being has etched in his personality the indelible stamp of the creator.”

The Rev. Shirley Strong, dean of students at the California Institute of Integral Studies, elaborates on King’s vision: “I understand the term Beloved Community to mean an inclusive, interrelated society based on love, compassion, responsibility, shared power and a respect for all people, places, and things—a society that radically transforms individuals and restructures institutions.” -from *The End of iChurch* by Fred Muir (*UU World*, Winter 2012)

Activity 2: Critical Reflection (25 minutes): Spend time answering the following question based on what each member is experiencing at General Assembly.

- What promises would we need to make to each other to create the Beloved Community within our congregations and beyond?

Check-out/Prayer/Extinguishing the Virtual Chalice Flame (2 minutes):

A time to express a one-sentence long take-away from the day or from the conversation

Closing Reading (2 minutes):

Prayer for this Church by Nancy Shaffer

Excerpted from *Instructions in Joy: Meditations* (Skinner House, 2002)

May we always have enough room for those
many who want to come in. May those who cherish
this church be so glad they cannot stop speaking,
stop asking, and may the crowding itself be a gladness
as we keep adding rooms. May we notice
each one who is new and invite her to stay.
May our list of names for the Holy not ever
be finished; and may we hear God chuckling
with us as we find still more.

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Session 2: Friday, June 20, 2013 (12:45—1:30 PM)

Theme: *Promises to Our Faith*

Check-In

[5 minutes] Each person can briefly reflect upon what they may need to let go of to be able to be present in this time.

Chalice Lighting

[2 minutes] Opening Song - Gathered Here (see session I)

Contemporary Commitments

[8 minutes] The facilitator begins by saying:

Hear these words from 20th century Unitarian theologian James Luther Adams: 'Human beings, individually and collectively, become human by making commitments, by making promises. The human being...is the promise-making, promise-keeping, promise-breaking, promise-renewing creature.'

What commitments are being asked of you at this GA?

Text-based meditation

[10 minutes] a) The facilitator introduces the text-based meditation:

It's not always easy to make a commitment and follow through with it. Humans have been struggling with this issue for thousands of years. The Hebrew Bible is one place where we find stories about the timeless challenge of commitment. It's also the origin of our term "covenant."

As Unitarian Universalists, we have many different ways of reading the Bible. Today, we're going to try something new. Instead of debating the Bible intellectually, we're going to engage with it spiritually. We're going to use it – the way we might use a poem – to spark our own imagination.

To begin our meditation, I will read a passage from the Hebrew Bible that illustrates how our ancestors understood their promises to their faith. Afterwards, we will sit in silence for five minutes. See what feelings or thoughts arise. You may wish to read the text to yourself again during that time or meditate on a word or phrase that speaks to you.

We will then break the silence with the sound of a chime. After you hear the chime, you are invited to speak aloud a word or phrase from the text that resonated with you during that time of silence.

b) The facilitator reads the appended reading.

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c)

The facilitator oversees 5 minutes of silence.

d) The facilitator breaks the silence with a chime or signal

Critical Reflection

[15 minutes]

a) The facilitator introduces the second section:

“Let us take a moment to read verses 11 through 14 again, but as a group, so that we can hear the many voices that have transmitted that story down through the ages in the voices of the people in this time and in this place. We will go around the circle, and each of us will read one line until everyone who wants to has read.”

The appendix is passed around and the highlighted and italicized lines are read aloud.

b) The facilitator offers the first conversation prompt:

“Our faith empowers us to choose how we will respond when invited into covenant. Have we had moments of confronting a metaphorical Pharaoh? Describe a time in your life when you were asked to make a difficult commitment. How did you respond?”

Blessing

[3 minutes]

Offer the following blessing:

“May we find the strength of soul to live up to the promises we make and to renew them when we fall short.

Let us remember that the hardest commitments to keep are the ones most capable of growing our souls.

We go forth with renewed compassion for the challenges in life and renewed courage to move through them in love.

Chalice Extinguishing / Closing Song

[2 minutes]

Come and Go With Me (STJ #1018)

*Come and go with me to that land,
Come and go with me to that land,
Come and go with me to that land where I'm bound.
Come and go with me to that land,
Come and go with me to that land,
Come and go with me to that land where I'm bound.*

APPENDIX

The facilitator reads the following:

This passage asks us to grapple with the question of who and what we are accountable to as a people of faith. Please feel free to use the word 'God' as a symbol for that which is larger than us according to your own beliefs.

From the Book of Exodus, Chapter 3, verses 1 through 14.

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.'

He said further, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey ... The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.'

But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?'

God said, 'I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.'

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But

Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you', and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?'

God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

Session 3: Saturday, June 22, 2013 (12:45—1:30 PM)

Theme: Promises to the Wider World

Check-in (3 minutes): A brief check-in about how each group member is feeling.

Virtual Chalice Lighting (1 minute): If you have a smart phone, you may wish to download "Illuminations: a uu app" and use the virtual chalice. Use the following words:

"There is no path to God that bypasses your neighbor." -Rev. Jesse Cavileer (1916-2004)

Review of Covenant and Experiences (4 minutes): Review the covenant/agreement and then ask for a brief 30-second reflection on workshop sessions group members have attended.

Activity 1 (5 minutes): Read aloud the following poem.

Contact by Gordon McKeeman

I stretch forth my hand
Knowing not what I shall touch...

A tender spot,
An open wound,
Warmth,
Pulsing life
Fragile blossoms,
A rock,
Ice.

I am tentative, trembling
Wishing to avoid hurt,
Wanting to link my life with life.
Lonely, I desire companions,
Naked, I long for defenders,
Lost, I want to find,
To be found

Will I touch strangers
Or enemies
Or nothing?

My hand is withdrawn
But still it touches;
My vulnerable skin
My furrowed brow,
My empty pocket,
My full heart.

Do others reach, tremble, withdraw?
Do they desire, long, seek?
Are they lonely, fearful, lost?
Will they grasp a tentative, trembling
hand?

I stretch forth my hand
Knowing not what I shall touch,
But hoping...

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Ask group to sit in silence for 1-2 minutes

Activity 2: Critical Reflection (25 minutes):

Spend time answering the following questions based on what each member is experiencing at General Assembly. Use a timer to make sure you get to all of the questions.

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- What have you experienced during this General Assembly that has inspired you to want to reach out to the wider world? (8 minutes)
- How could that reaching out take the form of a promise? (8 minutes)
- How it might feel to make such a promise when there's no guarantee of success? (8 minutes)

Check-out/Prayer/Extinguishing the Virtual Chalice Flame (5 minutes):

Invite each participant to complete the end of Gordon McKeeman's words with a "hope" and share how that might become a "promise:" (You may pass around this piece of paper as an aid for the sharing.)

I stretch forth my hand

Knowing not what I shall touch,

But hoping.....

So I make the promise to.....

Closing Reading (2 minutes):

Prayer for Living in Tension by Joseph M. Cherry
from *Voices from the Margins: An Anthology of Meditations* (Skinner House, 2012)

If we have any hope of transforming the world and changing ourselves,
we must be
bold enough to step into our discomfort,
brave enough to be clumsy there,
loving enough to forgive ourselves and others.

May we, as a people of faith, be granted the strength to be
so bold,
so brave,
and so loving.

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Session 4: Sunday, June 23, 2013 (12:45—1:30 PM)

Theme: *Taking it Home*

Check-in (3 minutes): A brief check-in about how this GA has been for each person.

Virtual Chalice Lighting:

We receive fragments of holiness, glimpses of eternity, brief moments of insight. Let us gather them up for the precious gifts that they are and, renewed by their grace, move boldly into the unknown.

-- Sara Moores Campbell

Opening Reading (3 minutes):

The Disengagement Divide by Brené Brown

From *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead*. (New York: Gotham Press, 2012), pp. 176-177

Here's my theory: Disengagement is the issue underlying the majority of problems I see in families, schools, communities and organizations. ...We disengage to protect ourselves from vulnerability, shame, and feeling lost without purpose. We also disengage when we feel like the people who are leading us...aren't living up to their end of the social contract. (For example, politicians are) not living up to their side of the social contract and voter turnout statistics show that we are disengaging.

Religion is another example of social contract disengagement. First, disengagement is often the result of leaders not living up to the same values they are preaching. Second, in an uncertain world, we often feel desperate for absolutes. It's the human response to fear. When religious leaders...turn faith into "compliance and consequences," rather than teaching and modeling how to wrestle with the unknown and how to embrace mystery, the entire concept of faith is bankrupt on its own terms. Faith minus vulnerability equals politics, or worse, extremism. Spiritual connection and engagement is not built on compliance, it's the product of love, belonging and vulnerability.

Activity 1: Critical Reflection (10 minutes): Spend time answering the following question based on what each member has experienced at General Assembly.

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How might the shared practice of covenant encourage us as UUs to live with spiritual connection and engagement?

Activity 2: Action and Accountability (15 minutes): Ask the participants to divide into pairs. Explain: “You will each create an action plan of one thing you will do to bring the practice of covenant back to your congregation. First, everyone will sit in silence for 5 minutes, then the pairs will discuss and refine their individual action plans. The pairs will also schedule a phone meeting for the fall to check in on one another.

Silence (5 minutes): Use the timer on a smart phone with a gentle chime alarm, or a watch and a chime or bell.

Speaking in pairs (9 minutes):

Activity 3: Reporting Back (5 minutes): Ask each person to share the one thing they are planning to do to bring the practice of covenant back to their congregation, and when they are going to meet with their accountability partner.

Check-out/Prayer/Extinguishing the Virtual Chalice Flame (2 minutes):

A time to express in one word how their understanding of covenant has changed or deepened during General Assembly.

Closing Song (2 minutes): (#95 from *Singing the Living Tradition*)

There is more love somewhere (2x) I'm gonna keep on 'til I find it, there is more love somewhere

There is more hope somewhere (2x) I'm gonna keep on 'til I find it, there is more hope somewhere

There is more joy somewhere (2x) I'm gonna keep on 'til I find it, there is more joy somewhere

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